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New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Lajčák (Slovakia)

*In the absence of the President, Mr. Biang (Gabon),
Vice-President, took the Chair.*

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Agenda item 67

Report of the Human Rights Council

**Report of the Human Rights Council (A/72/53
and A/72/53/Add.1)**

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): In connection with this item, I would like to recall that at its 2nd plenary meeting, on 15 September 2017, the General Assembly decided to consider agenda item 67 in plenary meeting and in the Third Committee pursuant to resolution 65/281, of 17 June 2011.

I shall now make a statement on behalf of the President of the General Assembly.

(*spoke in English*)

I have the honour to deliver the following remarks on behalf of the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Miroslav Lajčák:

"I welcome the President of the Human Rights Council, His Excellency Mr. Joaquin Alexander Maza Martelli, who will today present the report of the Human Rights Council (A/72/53 and A/72/53/Add.1) to the General Assembly. I congratulate him on his leadership of the Council.

"The Human Rights Council is the main body within the United Nations dedicated to the

promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. Its importance remains clear. In so many places around the world we continue to witness violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Council, through its various mechanisms, procedures and resolutions, gives a voice to all people, including those who are most vulnerable and may otherwise not be heard. It is the main forum to address the situation of those facing gross violations, discrimination and exclusion.

"The Council has commenced the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). The UPR is an inclusive peer-review mechanism, based on the principles of dialogue, cooperation and equal treatment of all Member States. This mechanism reinforces the respect for human rights at both the national and global levels. The success of the UPR is another demonstration that the Human Rights Council is an effective mechanism to advance all human rights.

"Promoting and protecting human rights is one of the three pillars of the United Nations. Each pillar is essential, and all three pillars are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. As I said at the opening of the general debate, 'Human rights are crucial; neither peace nor development can take hold without them' (A/72/PV.3, p. 6). The work of the Council is therefore crucial to our collective responsibility to fulfil our commitments to achieving sustainable development, including in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,

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and pursuing global peace and security for 'We the peoples'.

"The debates and discussions within the Council are often intense and sometimes contentious. This is an expected scenario given the various interests and sensitivities regarding the issues on the Council's agenda. Nevertheless, it is of utmost importance that Member States work constructively to ensure that the Human Rights Council remains relevant and effective in safeguarding the human rights of all people.

"Amid the political and philosophical debates, let us place at the centre our shared responsibility to promote and protect the rights of all people as well as to address violations, including gross and systematic violations around the world. The Human Rights Council should continue to be central in our efforts."

(spoke in French)

In accordance with resolution 65/281, of 17 June 2011, I now give the floor to Mr. Maza Martelli, President of the Human Rights Council.

Mr. Maza Martelli (President, Human Rights Council) *(spoke in Spanish)*: It is an honour to introduce the annual report of the Human Rights Council (A/72/53 and A/72/53/Add.1) to the General Assembly. I would like to begin by congratulating the 15 recently elected members of the Human Rights Council. I have full confidence that all members of the Council will work hard to uphold the promotion and protection of human rights.

At the beginning of my presidency, I articulated what would give meaning to my mission in the Council: promoting universal respect for the protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction of any kind; addressing situations of violations of human rights, including gross and systematic violations; promoting the effective coordination and the mainstreaming of human rights within the United Nations system; and guiding the Council's work in favour of the principles of universality, impartiality, objectivity and non-selectivity, constructive international dialogue and cooperation. These principles of resolution 60/251 have guided my presidency this year.

The work of the Human Rights Council is summarized in the report, which contains the activities,

resolutions, decisions and President's statements adopted by the Council at its regular sessions this year, as well as the special session held on 14 December 2016. During the year, the Human Rights Council offered proactive responses to human rights issues through its country-specific and thematic mandates. Over the course of its three regular sessions, the Council adopted a total of 114 resolutions, 80 of which were adopted without a vote. Under its Universal Periodic Review mechanism, by the end of the year, the Council will have reviewed the fulfilment of human rights obligations by 28 member States.

I am also happy to report that the Council once again saw increased participation from small island developing States and least developed countries, thanks to the Voluntary Technical Assistance Trust Fund to Support Participation of Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States in the work of the Human Rights Council, which supported 27 representatives and Fellows from 26 countries.

Among the country-specific situations that the Council addressed this year, the situation in Myanmar deserved special attention. In addition to the report and the oral update of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, during its thirty-fourth session, the Council created an independent international fact-finding mission

"to establish the facts and circumstances of the alleged recent human rights violations by military and security forces, and abuses, in Myanmar, in particular in Rakhine state",

pursuant to Council resolution 34/22. Subsequent to hearing the oral update of and holding an interactive dialogue with the fact-finding mission during its thirty-sixth session, the Council decided to extend the mission's mandate until September 2018.

The Human Rights Council also considered the human rights situation in Syria. Interactive dialogues with the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic were held during all three of its regular sessions this year. The Council also extended the mandate of the Commission for another year. Moreover, during its thirty-fourth session, the Council held a panel discussion that provided an opportunity for victims to give their testimony on specific cases of enforced disappearances and arbitrary detention, and, in September, the Council decided to convene a high-level panel discussion on violations

of the human rights of children in the Syrian Arab Republic at the thirty-seventh session, to be held in March 2018.

In the light of the findings of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan and considering the human rights situation there, on 14 December 2016 the Council held a special session on the situation of human rights in that country. During its thirty-fourth session, in March of this year, the Council considered the comprehensive written report of the Commission on Human Rights, which was followed by an interactive dialogue. The Council subsequently extended the mandate of the Commission for another year and requested that, *inter alia*, it collect and preserve evidence of alleged gross violations and abuses of human rights and make such information available to all transitional justice mechanisms, pursuant to Council resolution 34/25. The Council also urged the speedy establishment of an independent hybrid court by the African Union Commission to investigate and prosecute those responsible for violations or abuses of international human rights and international humanitarian law, also pursuant to Council resolution 34/25.

The Council examined the oral update and the report of the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi, which was established in 2016 to conduct a thorough investigation into human rights violations and abuses in Burundi since April 2015, including on their extent and whether they may constitute international crimes, with a view to contributing to the fight against impunity and to identifying alleged perpetrators of human rights violations and abuses in Burundi with a view to ensuring full accountability, in accordance with Council resolution 33/24. In September, the Council extended the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry for another year. The Council also decided to request the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to urgently dispatch a team of three experts to engage with the Burundian authorities and all other stakeholders to collect and preserve information and to forward it to the judicial authorities of Burundi in order to establish the truth and ensure that the perpetrators of deplorable crimes are all accountable to the judicial authorities of Burundi, in accordance with Council resolution 36/2.

In relation to the reports of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the group of independent experts on accountability for human rights violations

in that country, the Council decided at its thirty-fourth session to strengthen the capacity of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Seoul so as to allow the implementation of the relevant recommendations made by the group of independent experts on accountability in its report, in accordance with Council resolution 34/24. Additionally, the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was extended for another year.

Concerning the situation of human rights in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, at its thirty-fifth session, the Council requested the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to dispatch a team of international experts, including experts from the region, to collect and preserve information to determine the facts and circumstances concerning alleged human rights violations and abuses, and violations of international humanitarian law, in the Kasai regions, pursuant to Council resolution 35/33.

This year, the Council has also requested the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to continue to assess progress on the implementation of its recommendations and other relevant processes related to reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka, and invited the High Commissioner to continue to report on the situations of human rights in Ukraine and in Libya. Through a resolution, the Council also requested that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights continue to provide technical assistance to Georgia through the operations of its Office in that country.

Regarding the human rights situation in Yemen, in September the Council requested that the High Commissioner establish a group of eminent international and regional experts with knowledge on human rights law and the context of Yemen, in order to monitor and report on the situation of human rights, make recommendations on improving the protection of human rights and engage with Yemeni authorities and all stakeholders, pursuant to Council resolution 36/31.

The Council has extended the existing country-specific special procedures mandates on Belarus, Cambodia, the Central African Republic, Eritrea, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mali, Somalia and the Sudan.

During this year's high-level panel discussion on promoting the mainstreaming of human rights

throughout the United Nations system, the Council discussed the contribution of human rights to peacebuilding through the enhancement of dialogue and international cooperation for the promotion of human rights. The Council was honoured to have the President of the General Assembly and the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support participate in the discussion, which has contributed to the sharing of experiences between Geneva and New York.

In 2017, the Human Rights Council has also continued to address a number of global issues, including human rights, in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, through thematic debates and panel discussions, for example, in panel discussions on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals in relation to the rights of the child and women's rights, as well as the integration of a gender perspective throughout the work of the Human Rights Council and that of its mechanisms.

In other panel discussions, including intersessional ones, the following topics were discussed: climate change; public health and access to medicines; unaccompanied migrant children and adolescents; racial profiling and incitement to hatred, including in the context of migration; the death penalty; the role of local Governments; the effects of terrorism on the enjoyment of all human rights; unilateral coercive measures; and the impact of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and violence in the context of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance on the full enjoyment of all human rights by women and girls. Throughout those discussions, the Council promoted universal respect for the protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.

This year, the Council established a new special-procedures mandate, namely, the Special Rapporteur on the elimination of discrimination against persons affected by leprosy and their family members, pursuant to Council resolution 35/9. However, the Council did not extend the mandates of the Independent Expert on Côte d'Ivoire or the Independent Expert on Haiti.

I wish to take this opportunity to emphasize that the special procedures of the Human Rights Council not only provide one of the main sources of reliable information on human rights issues and situations

around the world and a solid basis for dialogues and debates at the Council, but also contribute significantly to United Nations early-warning and prevention efforts. It is important that all countries cooperate with and grant access to these special-procedures mandate-holders so that they are able to carry out their work efficiently.

I am pleased to inform the Assembly that, to date, 118 Member States and one observer State have issued standing invitations to thematic special procedures. However, I am concerned by the position of some States in not cooperating with the Council's mechanisms or cooperating only with a select few. I call upon all States that have not yet done so to issue standing invitations to the special-procedures mandate-holders and fully cooperate with the Council's mechanisms.

Allow me now to turn to the Universal Periodic Review, the peer-review mechanism regarded as one of the greatest achievements of the Human Rights Council. The third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review began in May, and we will open the twenty-eighth session of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review next Monday. With 100 per cent participation over the first two cycles, the Universal Periodic Review is a true celebration of the principle of universality.

We have witnessed very positive developments; for example, there has been an increased focus on the follow-up and implementation of recommendations and the use of development assistance by States themselves in order to facilitate follow-up activities at the national level. Furthermore, to date, 66 States have voluntarily submitted Universal Periodic Review mid-term reports in relation to recommendations put forward during the first and second cycles. I hope that these good practices continue and that they are strengthened throughout the third cycle. I am very pleased that the Secretary-General has underscored, in his reports to the current session of the General Assembly, the importance of the Universal Periodic Review process in connection with the Sustainable Development Goals.

At its thirty-fifth session, the Human Rights Council acknowledged the crucial role that parliaments play in incorporating international commitments into national policies and laws, including by supporting the implementation of recommendations supported by States concerned in the framework of the Universal Periodic Review. Furthermore, a resolution was adopted on the contribution of parliaments to the

work of the Human Rights Council and its Universal Periodic Review.

The active participation of civil society and national human rights institutions is a core aspect of the work of the Human Rights Council. In addition to providing us with first-hand information from the field, interjecting unique perspectives into our discussions and drawing our attention to urgent human rights situations, they play a fundamental role in follow-up and capacity-building efforts in their home countries.

I wish to inform the Assembly that I have received allegations of intimidation, threats and reprisals against individuals who seek to cooperate or have cooperated with the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms, matters on which I have followed up directly with the States concerned. It is essential that duly accredited representatives of civil society and national human rights institutions be provided with a safe space to allow their voices to be heard, as well as to interact with other stakeholders. I regularly remind States that acts of intimidation and reprisals against individuals or groups that participate in the work of the Council or its mechanisms are unacceptable, and I call on them to take all necessary measures to prevent and ensure adequate protection against such acts.

This year, the Human Rights Council adopted several resolutions with recommendations made to the General Assembly. Through the resolution adopted in March on the human rights situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, the Human Rights Council recommended that the General Assembly submit the reports of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria to the Security Council for appropriate action (Council resolution 34/26). In its resolution on ensuring accountability and justice for all violations of international law in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, also adopted in March, the Council recommended that the General Assembly

"remain apprised of the matter until it is satisfied that appropriate action with regard to implementing the recommendations made by the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict in its report has been or is being taken appropriately at the national or international levels to ensure justice for victims and accountability for perpetrators" (Council resolution 34/28, para. 9).

In March, the Council also recommended that the General Assembly invite States located in the regions

where people of African descent live and of which they are citizens to offer to host regional conferences on the establishment of the forum of people of African descent with the participation of people of African descent with a view to making substantive contributions on the format, structure and content of the proposed forum.

Furthermore, through its resolution on the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted at its thirty-fifth session, the Council invited the General Assembly to consider holding a special commemorative meeting on the occasion of the anniversaries.

Finally, with regard to the situations of human rights in Eritrea and Burundi, the Council has requested the General Assembly to submit the reports and oral updates of the respective commissions of inquiry to all relevant organs of the United Nations for consideration and appropriate action, pursuant to Council resolutions 35/35 and 36/19, respectively.

Before concluding, I wish to highlight the increasing challenges that the Human Rights Council is facing with regard to the growing gap between the workload entailed in servicing the Human Rights Council and the resources allocated to the United Nations Office at Geneva and the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management. With a view to finding solutions to this issue, a joint task force was established in May, comprising a representative of the Bureau of the Human Rights Council and representatives of the United Nations Office at Geneva and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Based on the report and recommendations of the task force, in September, the Bureau presented various proposed measures, including substantive time-saving measures, to the Council for its consideration.

Despite holding several consultations on the proposals, including within the framework of a Council meeting on 20 October, it has not been possible to reach consensus on the proposed measures at this stage. Further Council consultations, to be held under the leadership of the next Bureau, will be required with a view to adopting sustainable measures to allow the Human Rights Council to carry out its work more efficiently.

As the Secretary-General told the Security Council in January,

"the interconnected nature of today's crises requires us to connect our own efforts for peace and security, sustainable development and human rights not just in words, but in practice (S/PV.7857, p. 3)".

Today, when the world is facing many complex crises with human rights dimensions, the work of the Human Rights Council, as the premier United Nations forum on human rights, is essential to the international community's efforts aimed at achieving peace, security and development. I therefore call on all States Members of the United Nations to focus their full and devoted attention to this issue.

I take this opportunity to thank the General Assembly for its consistent support for the Human Rights Council and its work, and express my most sincere hope that this support will continue throughout the rest of this year, as well as in the years to come.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I thank President Maza Martelli for introducing the report of the Human Rights Council.

Mr. Giorgio (Eritrea): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of African States.

The African Group welcomes this opportunity to have a dialogue with the President of the Human Rights Council, His Excellency Ambassador Maza Martelli, on the annual report of the Council's activities during its eleventh cycle year (A/72/53). We also appreciate the vision and leadership role played by the presidency in carrying out its mandate to support the work of the Council.

The African Group would like to reaffirm the Council's mandate as the principal United Nations body of first instance responsible for universal respect for the protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction of any kind and in a fair and equal manner, as enshrined in the founding resolution 60/251. We wish to recall that the Council's mandate should be driven by the principles of cooperation and genuine dialogue, free from politicization, selectivity and double standards.

Africa remains convinced that the Universal Periodic Review is a pillar of the work of the Human Rights Council in the fulfilment of States' human rights obligations and in the improvement of the situation on the ground. In realizing these objectives, the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance

in the implementation of the Universal Periodic Review must be provided with adequate resources so as to be able to assist States develop their national capacity and expertise for the implementation of the Council's recommendations.

The African Group reaffirms its endorsement of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, adopted at the third World Conference on Human Rights, on 25 June 1993. This outcome fundamentally underlines that, first, all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, and that, secondly, the right to development are a universal, inalienable right and an integral part of fundamental human rights. Furthermore, Africa fully subscribes to the terms of paragraph 14 of the Vienna Declaration, which states that,

"[t]he existence of widespread extreme poverty inhibits the full and effective enjoyment of human rights; its immediate alleviation and eventual elimination must remain a high priority for the international community."

We are encouraged by the Council's work in the area of the practical enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, which remains key to eradicating extreme poverty, inequality and underdevelopment worldwide, and we are of the view that more can be done in this area. The African Group places a high premium on the principle of constructive dialogue and international cooperation aimed at practically assisting States to fulfil their human rights obligations. The purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations impel us to promote global solidarity and to act towards one another in the spirit of concrete international cooperation, especially with a view towards achieving socioeconomic progress in the developing world.

The African Group's principled position on the notion of the justiciability of economic, social and cultural rights and their progressive realization is informed by the recognition that extreme poverty and social exclusion constitute a violation of human dignity and that urgent steps must be taken to achieve better understanding of extreme poverty and its causes. A troubling aspect of this is the negation of socioeconomic and cultural rights. We do not believe in a hierarchy of rights, which is consistent with the premise of the human rights-based approach. We cannot promote one set of rights to the exclusion of others and hope to

achieve the inculcation of human rights consciousness throughout the entire world.

At this juncture, the Group would like to reaffirm the mandate of the Third Committee to examine the work of the Human Rights Council through the adoption of its annual report. We have noted increasing attempts to undermine this mandate by proposing that the report of the Human Rights Council be submitted to the General Assembly without the endorsement of the Committee. The Group therefore wishes to caution against establishing such a dangerous precedent for the methods of work of the General Assembly and its subsidiary bodies. Any changes to this mandate would require the endorsement of the universal membership through an inclusive intergovernmental process. To this end, the African Group will continue to present its annual draft resolution towards the adoption of the report of the Human Rights Council.

In conclusion, we assure the presidency of the General Assembly of our support and cooperation as it leads the Council towards the fulfilment of its mandate.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Ms. Brito Maneira (European Union): The European Union (EU) would like to thank the President of the Human Rights Council, Ambassador Maza Martelli, for presenting the Council's twelfth annual report to the General Assembly (A/72/53). The candidate countries Montenegro and Albania, and the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, align themselves with this statement.

The European Union has strongly supported the Human Rights Council since its establishment, and it continues to do so. Eleven years have passed since the General Assembly established the Council, and much has been achieved. The system of special procedures, the establishment of accountability mechanisms, the Universal Periodic Review and all other mechanisms of the Council have contributed positively to the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide. Through the delivery of technical assistance and capacity-building mandates, it has also helped countries faced with human rights crises build human rights protection policies and fulfil their international obligations.

The Council has been entrusted with the mandate of promoting universal respect for the protection of

human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction of any kind and in a fair and equal manner. Also part of its mandate is addressing situations of violations of human rights, including gross and systematic violations and making recommendations thereon. Furthermore, the Council should also promote the effective coordination and mainstreaming of human rights within the United Nations system.

There is further potential to strengthen dialogue and synergies between the Human Rights Council and the Security Council so as to ensure that human rights are central to every United Nations action. The Human Rights Council's mandate to contribute to preventing human rights violations through dialogue and cooperation and to respond promptly to human rights emergencies must be fully operationalized so as to translate early warning into early action. The Council's existing mechanisms can be better used to play this stronger prevention role. The European Union looks forward to continuing to contribute to the full implementation of the Council's wide mandate granted under its founding resolution 60/251.

Calls for enhancing and strengthening the effectiveness of the Human Rights Council have steadily increased over the past few years. The EU is firmly committed to engaging constructively in an inclusive cross-regional process of reflection, dialogue and review coordinated from Geneva, focusing on the body's working methods, efficiency, effectiveness and impact. The outcomes of such a Geneva-coordinated process would then help inform action deemed necessary in New York.

The Secretary-General addressed the Council during its high-level segment in March, alerting us all to the fact that disregard for human rights is a disease that is spreading north, south, east and west, and he continued to say that the Human Rights Council must be part of the cure. The Council is indeed part of the cure. Commissions of inquiry and fact-finding missions have been established to respond to serious allegations of human rights violations and abuses around the world. The system of independent special-procedures mandate holders are our eyes and ears, contributing to a global early warning system that gives us indications of emerging crises and assisting countries in respecting, protecting and fulfilling their human rights obligations.

The European Union will continue to make every effort to ensure that the Human Rights Council is

not only able to help prevent or address human rights violations and abuses, including gross and systematic ones, as well as respond promptly to human rights emergencies, but also improve human rights standards and their implementation worldwide through systematic work on relevant thematic issues. In this context, the EU recalls the importance of the independence of the Council and strongly opposes any attempts to undermine the institutional position of the Council within the United Nations system.

The European Union welcomes the central role played by the Human Rights Council in addressing human rights situations throughout the world. The severe consequences of the crisis in Syria and the violations committed by all parties, particularly the Syrian regime and its allies, cannot be ignored by any State. Any breaches of international law, in particular international humanitarian law and human rights law, some of which may constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity, must be brought to justice. In this context, the Council's ongoing response to the crisis remains critically important, as demonstrated by efforts to foster accountability and fight against impunity.

The European Union welcomes the decision reached by consensus during the last session of the Human Rights Council to request the High Commissioner for Human Rights to establish a group of eminent international and regional experts to monitor and report on the human rights situation in Yemen, carry out a comprehensive examination of all alleged violations and abuses of international human rights law and other appropriate and applicable fields of international law committed by all parties to the conflict, establish the facts and circumstances surrounding the alleged violations and abuses and, where possible, identify those responsible. We call on all parties to cooperate fully with the new investigative mechanism for Yemen.

During the past year, the Human Rights Council has also demonstrated its commitment to promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka, and to providing technical assistance and capacity-building to promote human rights to the Governments of Côte d'Ivoire, Haiti and Mali. Furthermore, we welcome the continued support that has been rendered to the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, the Republic of Guinea, Georgia, Libya and Ukraine. We trust that the Council will continue to closely monitor situations where

technical assistance and capacity-building can make a difference and take action where necessary.

Civil society and human rights defenders play a crucial role in the work of the Council and its mechanisms, as provided for in the 2007 institution-building package. Targeting individuals or groups that engage with United Nations human rights mechanisms is deplorable and runs contrary to the promotion and protection of human rights. The EU strongly condemns any act of violence, harassment, intimidation, reprisal or threat thereof. The ability of individuals and groups to raise concerns with special procedures without fear is vital for the work of these mechanisms and their capacity to fulfil their mandates.

The issue of reprisals needs a consistent approach at the international and regional levels; we must do our utmost to prevent and eliminate such acts. Civil society and its representatives are valuable partners for human right mechanisms and the protection and promotion of human rights. We therefore welcome the work done by Andrew Gilmour, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, in the role designated by the Secretary-General to receive, consider and respond to allegations of intimidation and reprisals against those seeking to cooperate with the United Nations and its mechanisms. The EU will continue to support their engagement with the Council and the human rights mechanisms.

On 16 October, the General Assembly elected 15 new members of the Council (see A/72/PV.31). Serving as a Council member entails important responsibilities. Resolution 60/251 provides that members elected to the Council shall uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights and fully cooperate with the Council. While we congratulate the new members, we also remind them to pay careful attention to the human rights situations in their own countries and to cooperate with the Council mechanisms in the promotion and protection of the human rights of all, without discrimination of any kind. No State has a perfect human rights record, and we therefore encourage the newly elected members to engage in the work of the Council in a spirit of self-reflection, with a view to the improvement of our own human rights situation and to address all human rights concerns that come before the Council on the basis of their merits.

We also strongly encourage all States and other stakeholders to cooperate with the special procedures

as a means to enhance the protection and promotion of human rights. We take this opportunity to call on all States that have not yet done so to extend a standing invitation to all special procedures.

We welcome the fact that the Human Rights Council is seized of the serious human rights situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and underline the importance of the mechanism established on accountability concerning events in the Kasai regions. We urge the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to fully cooperate with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the international expert group in this regard.

Membership of the Council increases the responsibilities of the holder to cooperate with Council mechanisms and adhere to international norms and obligations. The EU welcomes the renewal of the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi and calls on the Government of Burundi, as a member of the Council, to cooperate fully with the Commission of Inquiry as well as with other international human rights mechanisms. As stated in the Council's founding resolution, members of the Human Rights Council should uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights, both domestically and internationally, and we reiterate our urgent call on the Government of Burundi to do so.

The EU welcomes the creation of an independent international fact-finding mission to establish the facts and circumstances of the alleged recent human rights violations and abuses by military and security forces and abuses in Myanmar, particularly in Rakhine state, with a view to ensuring full accountability for perpetrators and justice for victims. The EU takes the opportunity to call once again on the Government of Myanmar to cooperate with this mission.

We also welcome the extensions of the country-specific mandates of the Special Rapporteurs on the situations of human rights in Myanmar, Iran, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Eritrea and Belarus and the extension of the mandate of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan. In this regard, it is important to recall the special session held in December 2016 following allegations of ethnic cleansing, including claims of sexual violence of an unprecedented severity and scale.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate our continued commitment to the work of the Human Rights Council

and to further strengthening the Council's role in the protection and promotion of human rights, the development of international human rights law and in the prevention of human rights violations and abuses. We will continue to systematically uphold and ensure the implementation of existing international norms and standards, and at all times strongly defend the universality, indivisibility, interdependency, inalienability and interrelated character of human rights.

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): First of all, I would like to express once again Qatar's indignation at and condemnation of the act of terrorism perpetrated in New York. We express our most sincere sympathy to the victims and to the Government and the people of the United States, and we trust that the injured will recover rapidly. We wish to state that Qatar stands with the United States and supports all steps taken to safeguard peace and stability.

I would like to say that we greatly appreciate the words of Ambassador Maza Martelli, President of the Human Rights Council. We thank him for his work, which has been described in the comprehensive and noteworthy report (A/72/53 and A/72/53/Add.1). Qatar continues to participate in the work of the Human Rights Council as a member. We have been elected once again for the new 2018-2020 term, and we are determined to continue our effective work in the Council to promote fundamental rights and freedoms.

We pay tribute to the work being done by the Council in accordance with the principles of neutrality, objectivity and impartiality. We shall continue to cooperate with members of the Council in order to enable the Council to execute its mandate pursuant to those principles.

Qatar plays its role in striving to fulfil the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations with respect to the protection of human rights, the maintenance of international peace and security and the achievement of development. My country incorporates those concepts in its policies and in its Constitution, seeking to strengthen human rights and fundamental freedoms while ensuring respect for such rights and the protection of all. We achieve that end by means of our national institutions, which effectively contribute to the implementation of Government policy for the promotion and the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We cooperate with other States and with United Nations mechanisms on the basis of our open-door policy to welcome those holding mandates related to human rights. The Qatar National Vision 2030 is therefore founded on the strategic approach that human rights are fundamental to education, health care, the environment, workers' rights, the empowerment of women and the rights of the child, of those with special needs and of the elderly. Vesting its trust in international cooperation on human rights, Qatar welcomes the establishment of the United Nations Human Rights Training and Documentation Centre for South-West Asia and the Arab Region on 12 February 2006, pursuant to resolution 60/153. The Centre plays an important role and is respected by the United Nations and other relevant institutions.

The report of the Human Rights Council submitted to the General Assembly reflects the difficult situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. Establishing peace in the Middle East must involve respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. The relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council must also be observed. The report of the Human Rights Council also mentions the serious deterioration of the human rights situation in Syria and the serious and systematic violations being committed on a large scale. The Syrian people must be protected and the ceasefire must continue.

As we believe in the primacy of law and the principles of justice and human dignity, and since we are fully aware of the importance of human rights to the stability and prosperity of societies, we have been careful to adopt a consistent approach in order to promote human rights in cooperation with institutions of States Members of the United Nations. Qatar has made major strides nationally, regionally and internationally in that regard. However, we still face illegal and unilateral measures against my country, which constitute a serious violation of human rights owing to their negative consequences, as established by the National Human Rights Committee in Qatar, in the areas of education, health care, the dispersal of families and restrictions on freedom of movement and residence.

Given those negative effects on human rights, the international community must ensure that international law is observed by preventing the imposition on States of policies that seek to flout international human rights

standards. Such policies adopted against a State such as ours, which plays a pivotal role in implementing the objectives of the United Nations, undermine international efforts to promote human rights.

In conclusion, we reiterate our support for the promotion of human rights in an impartial and objective way and our cooperation with international organizations such as the United Nations, the Human Rights Council and other specialized bodies.

Ms. Wilson (Australia): I have the pleasure of delivering this statement on behalf of Canada, Iceland, Liechtenstein, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland and my own country, Australia.

We take this opportunity to reaffirm our support for the Human Rights Council as the pre-eminent United Nations forum for consideration, discussion and action on human rights. At this time of increasing polarization, populism and fundamentalism, it is crucial that States Members of the United Nations safeguard the integrity of the Human Rights Council.

The Council plays a crucial role in highlighting deteriorating human rights situations and in calling on States to uphold their responsibility to protect their populations and their obligations to respect and to ensure human rights. The Council provides the most appropriate forum to affirm that international human rights apply equally to all people regardless of their race, religion, creed, disability, sexuality or gender identity, including online. Without the Council, the international human rights discourse would be poorer, human rights violations would go unrecorded and the voiceless would remain so.

We underscore the importance of the Council's direct reporting relationship with the plenary of the General Assembly, in accordance with resolution 65/281. We call upon Member States to join us in acknowledging and in respecting the separate mandate of the Human Rights Council.

We also take this opportunity to emphasize that members of the Human Rights Council should uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights, as mandated by resolution 60/251. No State has all the answers when it comes to the protection and promotion of human rights. There is room for us all to improve our records and the situations faced by our citizens. However, the tolerance of, acquiescence to or the commission of gross and systemic violations

is always reprehensible. Such behaviour should not be accepted or condoned by members of the Human Rights Council. Being a member of the Council is a privilege that allows States to drive the global human rights agenda. Our countries support the ongoing discussion about how the Human Rights Council could be reformed to secure its continued status as a respected advocate for human rights.

In our national capacity, we would like to note that Australia was recently elected to the Human Rights Council for the 2018-2020 term. As a member, Australia will take a pragmatic and principled approach to the Council and continue to defend human rights both at home and abroad. We will not shy away from difficult issues in our own human rights record, and we will strongly encourage other Council members to do the same. Our membership term will be characterized by consultations with civil society, national human rights institutions and human rights defenders.

Our seven countries are deeply concerned by the increasing hostility to civil society and human rights defenders, both online and offline. Without these key actors, the Human Rights Council would have little to no visibility of the lived experiences of individual rights-holders in any country. We reject reprisals against any person cooperating or seeking to cooperate with the United Nations human rights mechanisms or agencies outright, including when these reprisals arise out of participation in the Human Rights Council, contributions to its Universal Periodic Review or engagement with the Council's special-procedures mandates.

We are also deeply concerned by the harassment, intimidation and obstruction shown by States to special-procedures mandate-holders. While special procedures must be even-handed and fair and operate in line with their mandates, a mandate-holder is an independent voice. It is the mandate-holder's job to shine a spotlight on human rights abuses and violations, research and report on worrying trends, encourage new norms and share expertise and best practices with the global community. We therefore call upon all States to work constructively with the special procedures of the Human Rights Council, grant access where required, consider their recommendations in good faith and engage respectfully, even when common ground is difficult to find. All of our countries benefit from the scrutiny that the special procedures bring to bear.

As we look towards the future, our nations believe that, if the Human Rights Council is going to remain effective, it must emphasize diversity and inclusion. It is not sufficient that human rights be enjoyed by members of majority groups but not minorities, by men but not women, or by adults but not children, adolescents or older persons. We have the tools in our hands, including the Council and the existing body of human rights treaties, to ensure that no one is left behind. We must focus on ensuring that human rights protections are enacted for all equally. That must include ensuring that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons enjoy equal protection of their rights, and freedom from violence and discrimination; that people with disabilities are empowered to participate equally as contributors, leaders and decision-makers; and that the rights of indigenous peoples are respected and upheld. We must reject cultural relativism, calls for collective rights to trump individual rights, and arguments that sovereignty should obviate the need for international scrutiny.

We urge States to look back at and consistently apply the agreed language in core international human rights instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, and to look forward and use the resolutions of the Human Rights Council and the Third Committee to ensure that human rights protections are inclusive and embrace our global diversity.

Mr. Wenaweser (Liechtenstein): Given the breadth of its thematic activities and its responsiveness to human rights emergencies, as the report presented by the President of the Human Rights Council (A/72/53 and A/72/53/Add.1) illustrates, the Council is living up to its role as the central and permanent human rights body of the Organization. Since its creation, it has established itself as an authoritative voice in the promotion and protection of human rights, including through the truly Universal Periodic Review process, its body of special procedures and its close engagement with human rights defenders.

The review of the Human Rights Council in 2011 confirmed the generally positive perception of the Council among the membership. We collectively refrained from an institutional overhaul and, instead, used the opportunity to strengthen the Council's institutional standing in relation to the General Assembly and its Third Committee. A large majority of the Council's decisions are taken autonomously and

immediately implemented. But the Council also reports to the plenary of the General Assembly and feeds its recommendations into the dedicated General Assembly Committees, namely, the Third and Fifth Committees. We believe that such finely calibrated compromise has served both the Council and the Assembly well.

We also see room for improvement in a number of areas. As pointed out by others, not all provisions of the Council's founding resolution 60/251 have been implemented in practice. The resolution stipulates that Council members shall uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights, which has been a political commitment for the General Assembly membership. We as States have to live up to that responsibility when electing the membership of the Council. We call upon States to publicly renew this commitment and adapt their election practices accordingly, as a contribution to strengthening the Council in its mission and its daily work.

We also support calls for greater efficiency and effectiveness in the work and functioning of the Council. Its efficiency and impact on the ground can certainly benefit from a review of its working methods and a resetting of priorities. We welcome the effort undertaken in the framework of the Council itself in Geneva, which can and should build on experience and best practices from the entire United Nations system.

We welcome the resolution adopted by the Council on the human rights situation in Myanmar, and in particular the decision to dispatch an independent, international fact-finding mission in order to establish the facts and circumstances of alleged human rights violations, especially in Rakhine state. The setting up of that mission is an important step towards ensuring both full accountability for perpetrators and justice for victims. Events since have illustrated that more and urgent action is needed, lest that decision prove to be too little, too late.

We also welcome the resolution adopted by the Council on the situation in Yemen, and in particular the overdue establishment of an international, independent investigative body to carry out comprehensive, impartial and transparent investigations of atrocities and violations of international law. With that decision, the Council has finally shown its readiness to address the urgent situation in Yemen and has sent a clear signal for the need for accountability.

Our commitment to the protection of human rights begins at the national level. The most significant recent measure is the creation in Liechtenstein of an independent national human rights institution, in accordance with the Paris Principles. We have therefore implemented the long-standing recommendations of various international human rights bodies.

Our national human rights institution is being independently developed by civil society, without the involvement of the Government, while receiving funding from the State. Its responsibilities include advising public authorities and private parties on human rights issues, supporting victims of human rights violations, informing the public about the situation of human rights in the country, carrying out investigations, recommending measures to be taken, preparing comments on draft laws and ordinances and the ratification of international agreements, as well as promoting dialogue with national and international bodies. We are convinced that this new institution adds value to the protection of human rights and therefore further strengthens the high standards implicit in the concept of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Mr. Lal (India): We welcome the President of the Human Rights Council, Mr. Maza Martelli, and thank him for his detailed statement.

The Human Rights Council plays an important role in furthering our common cause of the promotion and protection of human rights for all. Even as the Human Rights Council has sought to overcome the challenges faced by its earlier avatar, its work has not been smooth and, regrettably, often proves to be contentious. The reasons for many of the difficulties surrounding the discussions on the human rights agenda are not hard to find: divergent priorities and concerns stem primarily from the very wide range of situations that exist in terms, for example, of member States' levels of development, social and cultural contexts and governance systems.

At the same time, the palette of human rights also represents an entire range of aspects, from civil and political, to economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development. The question of whether collective rights should be given priority over individual rights is sometimes debated. Agreeing on the right way to promote and protect human rights, including in situations of possible gross violations, is also difficult if it clashes with the idea of the sovereignty of States.

Therefore, while the global discourse on human rights has continued to evolve, fundamental contradictions remain. The relative prioritization of the individual over the State, national sovereignty over international norms and a universal over a culture-specific approach evoke differing opinions. Constraints on national capacities to implement certain rights, instances of the politicization of human rights issues as a foreign policy tool and perceived intrusiveness beyond mandated activities remain areas of contention. While the international community has developed extensive institutional mechanisms and normative frameworks encompassing various aspects of human rights, there are also continuing calls for reform of some of these mechanisms, including the Human Rights Council itself.

The momentum to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development and to prevent the gross violation of human rights in armed conflicts and terrorist attacks around the world over the past two decades has informed recent debates on human rights. This is witnessed in the somewhat contradictory approaches inherent in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, on the one hand, and the moves towards external action to prevent violations and abuses and protect civilians, on the other hand. Emerging technologies ranging from cyber- to genetic engineering to artificial intelligence will also soon inform such debates in view of their uneven impact on peoples' lives and rights.

The work of the Human Rights Council continues to expand. This is reflected in the large number of resolutions and decisions being adopted on a range of issues and the greater frequency of meetings and the holding of special sessions. The effectiveness of its work, however, is not always clear. There is a proliferation of special procedures on both thematic and country-specific situations. The work of the special procedures is often constrained by a lack of adequate funds, and the opacity of funding is also an area of concern. There is the problem of certain special procedures clearly exceeding their mandates. A more balanced representation in the staffing of institutions, such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), would add to their effectiveness. Further, the country-specific special procedures have largely been counterproductive, and the Council's role in providing technical capacity-building has been limited to only a few situations.

In that context, the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism counts as a significant success over the past decade of the Human Rights Council. Every Member State has presented its report at least once. Also, significantly, a number of specific recommendations emerging from this very interactive and constructive exercise have been implemented by a number of Member States in their domestic contexts. These are concrete instances of change occurring as a result of our collective work.

This year, India presented the Universal Periodic Review of its human rights record — its third in fewer than 10 years — at the Human Rights Council in Geneva. Also this year, India presented its voluntary national review on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda at United Nations Headquarters. Both these voluntary and State-driven processes elicited wide interest and engagement. A similar voluntary aspect is behind the success of the climate-action contributions put forward by the parties to the landmark Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

Each of the foregoing is an instance of constructive and collaborative engagement for shaping a better collective future. We believe that this cooperative spirit, rather than counterproductive and often politicized naming and shaming, is essential to enhancing the promotion and protection of human rights globally.

India has engaged actively at the Human Rights Council. It recognizes the primacy of national responsibility and efforts aimed at realizing human rights. The promotion and protection of human rights should be addressed in a fair and equal manner, with, as the guiding principles, objectivity, respect for national sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference in the internal affairs of States, non-selectivity and transparency.

In conclusion, we firmly believe that all State parties must make every effort to fulfil their treaty obligations. The approach of the Human Rights Council, treaty bodies, special procedures and OHCHR should not be confrontational; rather, it should focus on achieving the desired results through dialogue and capacity-building.

Ms. Alsabah (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): First of all, I would like to welcome His Excellency Mr. Maza Martelli, President of the Human Rights Council, who is with us in this Hall today. I also welcome the efforts that have been made during his presidency and

thank him for the comprehensive report (A/72/53) he presented at the start of today's meeting.

My delegation familiarized itself with the report and its addendum, as well as the ideas they contain, which cover the special session of the Human Rights Council and the thirty-fourth, thirty-fifth and thirty-sixth ordinary sessions of the Council, as well as resolutions, decisions and President's statements that are relevant to the discussion.

Kuwait is mindful of the challenges that are being encountered by the United Nations and its bodies, in particular the Human Rights Council and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in the area of promoting and protecting human rights. These bodies are working so that all peoples of the world may enjoy human rights pursuant to, first, the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, in particular, paragraph 3 of Article 1 thereof, which sets forth as one of the main purposes of the United Nations to "promot[e] and encourag[e] respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion"; secondly, States' commitments under international law; and, thirdly, the aspirations of States to create a world where development is sustainable and countries are secure, safe and stable.

In discussing the importance of enhancing cooperation among the States Members of the United Nations and the Organization itself, including the relevant United Nations human rights bodies, we would like to review cooperation between Kuwait and those United Nations bodies. We note the successful visit in February of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein. He was made aware of national measures that we have taken in favour of human rights. In particular, he noted the human rights law that we adopted on the rights of families and minors, as well as other human rights legislation.

Kuwait has also hosted Special Rapporteurs within the context of special procedures and mandates. In December 2016 and September 2017, we hosted the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children. The Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law also visited. We are hoping to host visits from the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities and the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the

right to non-discrimination in this context. We hope to receive greater cooperation from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and its staff. We hope that the international community will provide greater assistance and support to the High Commissioner in this regard, so that our human rights situation may be strengthened and become more universally acceptable.

It is unfortunate to see ongoing flagrant violations of human rights in various parts of the world. It is a complex challenge that the international community must address with wisdom and care. We deeply regret the many challenges in our region resulting from numerous conflicts that are affecting our brotherly peoples, who have been scattered and weakened. We firmly believe that the ongoing occupation of Palestinian territories by Israel is a flagrant violation of the human rights of the unarmed Palestinian people and contravenes international law and international humanitarian law, as well as all relevant Security Council resolutions. We also express our regret and concern with respect to the violations of the rights of the Rohingya population in Myanmar, especially their right to life.

Finally, my delegation would like to reaffirm the importance of strengthening and protecting respect for human rights. Peace is a human right in itself. Since human rights are always evolving, we should strive to do more to guarantee that they are complied with and that people have access to them. Rules and rights, at both the national and international levels, need to adapt to and remain consistent with a world in constant change.

Ms. Shilo (Israel): Human rights are not reserved for a select few. Human rights belong to all humans because they are human.

Next year, we will mark the seventieth year since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which means that it has been 70 years since the world was offered a chance for a brighter future, based on universally recognized rights. Next year also marks the seventieth anniversary of the establishment of the State of Israel. In 1948, Israel committed itself to promoting, protecting and respecting human rights for all. It is a commitment that remains central to Israel's democracy today. Our Declaration of Independence makes the following pledge. Israel will

"foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants ... irrespective of religion, race and sex".

Israel is committed to achieving gender equality and empowering women. Substantial Government legislation aims to reach those goals by facilitating mobility for women in the workplace, helping more women in Israel become chief executive officers, diplomats, high-ranking military leaders and Nobel Prize laureates. We are also working hard to make a difference on a global scale. Earlier this year, Israel introduced the first-ever United Nations resolution adopted by consensus on the prevention and elimination of sexual harassment in the workplace. Furthermore, civil society plays an essential role in Israel, where its vibrant involvement is a cornerstone of our nation's culture.

I would be remiss if I did not address the dismal and hypocritical situation of the Human Rights Council. Baseless accusations and dozens of biased resolutions of the Council under agenda item 7 have become part of a global campaign to delegitimize and demonize the State of Israel. This must change if we truly want to promote and protect human rights. The High Commissioner himself referred in early September to the hypocrisy that exists in the work of the Human Rights Council, when he said that "selectivity becomes a poison that eats away at the credibility of this body".

Israel has reiterated that fact time and time again. However, agenda item 7 remains and, with it, the singling out of one State — the State of Israel. And while this happens, the world's worst human rights violators avoid scrutiny. Some of them are even members of the Council and are therefore entrusted with the protection of human rights for the entire world. Israel has called, still calls and will continue to call for reform of the Human Rights Council that finally erases the discriminatory practices targeting our country.

When Mr. Elie Wiesel accepted his Nobel Peace Prize, he noted that human rights were being violated on every continent and that there were more oppressed people in the world than there were free people. He simply asked how one could not be sensitive to their plight. We must ask ourselves a similar question. What are we doing to promote, protect and respect the human rights of all people? It will take our combined efforts to fulfil the noble aspirations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The struggle for human rights is an ongoing battle, and it is a battle that we must win.

Ms. Velichko (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): As a founding State Member of the United Nations, Belarus

has always been and will remain an ethical and responsible participant in discharging its international commitments, including in the field of human rights. The establishment of the Human Rights Council is an important historical chapter in the work of the United Nations. The Council has been in existence for 11 years, which is enough time to allow us to draw conclusions about the work it has accomplished. Undoubtedly, a significant achievement of the Council is the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), which plays the role of an impartial monitoring mechanism on the human rights situation in all countries, without exception. It is through the UPR that we designed the dialogue with States.

At the same time, the Human Rights Council has been unable to rid itself of the flaws of the Commission on Human Rights, which it replaced. Unfortunately, the Human Rights Council has been constantly burdening its agenda with confrontational decisions related to politicized approaches to human rights. An example of this would be, most of all, the country-specific resolutions, whose selectivity and political motives destroy the basic principles under which the Human Rights Council and the entire United Nations should be operating.

We cannot help but be concerned at the fact that Member States do not seek to negotiate or reach consensus when making decisions in the Human Rights Council. As a result, a significant number of Council resolutions are adopted by vote, and many of the decisions represent a false consensus, since States subsequently dissociate themselves from adopted decisions. These decisions then cause disputes among Member States in the General Assembly. For some reason, it seems better to allocate considerable resources from the United Nations regular budget, which is derived from mandatory contributions from all States Members of the United Nations, to the implementation of non-consensual decisions than to support decisions aimed at addressing the real needs of States, which calls into question the legitimacy of the financing for these decisions.

We should take note of one more alarming trend that is increasing the costs of the Council's activities. This year's report of the Council to the General Assembly (A/72/53) demonstrates an ongoing trend towards increasing its workload in relation to the implementation of resolutions and decisions adopted by the Council. We consider it unacceptable to expand the agenda of the Human Rights Council. In this context,

we have seen some inappropriate ideas emerging on extending the duration of the Council's sessions. We suggest, in contrast, that the Council take a serious look at this approach to the work and refrain from duplicating the decisions of the General Assembly and promoting divisive resolutions.

We would like to emphasize that until States stop manipulating human rights for their political and narrow national interests, the Human Rights Council will not be able to have a constructive impact on real human rights situations on the ground. Instead of pursuing ineffective and costly country-specific procedures and commissions of inquiry, the Human Rights Council should encourage the cooperation of States with all relevant United Nations bodies in the field of human rights. An increasing number of States are following the example of Belarus by adopting comprehensive plans aimed at implementing the recommendations of the UPR of the Human Rights Council. Such practices should be adhered to and encouraged in all countries, without exception, regardless of their level of development or human rights situation.

Mr. Sukhee (Mongolia): At the outset, I would like to express our sincere appreciation to the President of the Human Rights Council for his leadership and for presenting the report of the Council (A/72/53) today.

Mongolia commends the outcomes of the Council's work in the areas of the human rights of women, children and persons with disabilities, the abolition of the death penalty, trafficking in humans, racial discrimination, freedom of expression and peaceful assembly and association, and human rights defenders, all of which reflect the priorities set out in our voluntary pledges. During the reporting period, the Human Rights Council has made important strides, including in the creation of the mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the right to development.

Human rights are vital for ensuring peace and security. In this regard, the role of the Council is particularly critical in conflict-affected areas where situations of human rights and freedoms have deteriorated and where there have been serious violations of the norms of international human rights law.

As Mongolia is currently serving the second year of its membership of the Council, it is committed to continuing to contribute to the full implementation of its mandate. One of the major achievements of the Human Rights Council is indisputably the Universal Periodic

Review (UPR), which is an effective mechanism for assessing the human rights situations of all States Members of the United Nations. We commend the successful conclusion of the second cycle of the UPR. With respect to its third cycle, we align ourselves with many other Member States in the belief that it should focus more on implementing the recommendations of the previous cycles. Accordingly, technical assistance and capacity-building are vital.

We also consider the special-procedures mandate-holders as an integral part of the Human Rights Council and fully acknowledge their contribution to the effective promotion and protection of the human rights of all persons. In September 2017, the Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment, dedicated to monitoring compliance with obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, visited Mongolia, as did the United Nations Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

In our view, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights needs greater financial and human resources so as to be able to respond to and address human rights violations and facilitate capacity-building for Member States. There should also be more resources available for the effective implementation of the relevant recommendations. We believe that the Council needs to step up its action on the correlation between business and human rights, although this issue has only recently come to the fore of the global human rights agenda. The Human Rights Council should give greater attention to the situations where human rights are seriously jeopardized within or by private business entities. In this sense, Member States should constructively enhance their partnership and engagement with the private sector. As for the Government of Mongolia, we have shown our commitment by inviting a member of the Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises to visit our country in 2012.

We would also take this opportunity to commend the initiative of and work undertaken by the President of the Council to move the discussion with Council members forward with an view to improving the Council's working methods and enhancing its overall efficiency. Indeed, we believe that the Council's efficiency could be further improved. Mongolia stands ready to offer its

support for initiatives aimed at improving the working methods of the Council in a manner that is beneficial to all States and other stakeholders.

Mr. Hassani Nejad Pirkouhi (Islamic Republic of Iran): The Islamic Republic of Iran has taken note of the report of the Human Rights Council (A/72/53), and the statement made by Mr. Maza Martelli, President of the Human Rights Council, for which we thank him.

Iran reaffirms its support for the work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and his Office in fulfilling the mandate set forth in resolution 48/141. Iran also wishes to reiterate its firm commitment to an open, inclusive and constructive dialogue among Member States on all human rights issues in the framework of the Human Rights Council and its founding resolution 60/251.

Unfortunately, the Council has yet to be fully utilized as a medium for dialogue and cooperation. Rather, in many instances, the Council has been exploited for mere political purposes through the use of confrontational and selective approaches. Politicization and manipulation have increased mistrust and eroded the effectiveness of the Council and its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism.

The rationale behind the UPR mechanism was to ensure universality, objectivity, non-selectivity and impartiality in the work of the Council. It is therefore unfortunate that a few countries still prefer to revert to the dysfunctional practice of the Commission on Human Rights and table country-specific resolutions that have no value and encourage confrontation rather than cooperation in the Council. Accordingly, it should not come as a surprise that the Council is finding itself on the same path that led to the demise of the Commission on Human Rights.

The report of the Council includes, as a product of the unconstructive attempts of a few countries, a reference to a resolution that was adopted against my country. Bearing in mind all the facts on the ground, as well as the continuous cooperation of my country with various human rights mechanisms, in particular the UPR, the resolution, its ensuing reports and the appointment of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran are definitely misplaced, unwarranted and objectionable. The resolution is one of those instances that exposes the shortcomings of the Council and is nothing but a waste of limited resources that otherwise could be

utilized for the meaningful promotion and protection of human rights.

Accordingly, the Islamic Republic of Iran dissociates itself from the part of the Human Rights Council's report that includes the so-called resolution on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. In the meantime, we also reiterate our principled position of non-recognition of and non-cooperation with the mandates that are created by the Council outside of the sphere of internationally recognized human rights.

In conclusion, the Islamic Republic of Iran would like to underscore the important role of the Human Rights Council in confronting and addressing vicious waves of racism, bigotry, violent extremism and terrorism. The Human Rights Council has a role to play in raising global awareness of the imminent threat of terrorism and the mindsets behind it. The world should be warned of the speedy mobility of the evil forces of violent extremism and terrorism, and, more importantly, supporters of these menaces, including the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, should be cautioned that the boomerang they have thrown at others will sooner or later hit them when it returns.

Mr. Lukiantsev (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian Federation is of the view that the Human Rights Council should scrupulously follow the norms of international law and the principles of universality, impartiality, objectivity and non-selectivity in its work so as to promote and defend human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction.

We must note that in the work of the Human Rights Council, politicization and confrontation are gaining steam. The Council is steadily evolving from an international platform for conducting mutually respectful dialogue on current human rights issues into an arena for some countries to settle their political scores. This alarming trend is expressed not only in increased attention to country-specific topics but in increasingly polarized discussions on agenda items that used to be carried out in a constructive and neutral manner. Even the thematic agenda items of the Council are increasingly being used by countries to make politically motivated demands of one another.

The Russian position remains unchanged. There are no countries in the world free of human rights violations. In this regard, we believe that it is completely unacceptable for States to have policies that include

mentoring, defaming or labelling, although many States do. They discredit the very idea of cooperation to promote and protect human rights and the work of United Nations human rights bodies. Nor is the Council's effectiveness increased when the work of its special procedures regularly not only exceeds mandates and duplicates each other's work but also suffers from a high degree of political bias, thus contradicting the code of conduct of the special procedures.

Unfortunately, the seemingly most neutral agenda item of the Council — agenda item 10, on technical assistance and capacity-building — has not avoided politicization. The desire of some States with respect to that agenda item is to achieve their own short-term political objectives having to do, in particular, with defining the national legal status of territories. This undermines the major principles of technical assistance for the promotion and protection of human rights: non-confrontation and depoliticization. It inserts an added element of division into the work of the Council. In this context, we confirm our position that is unacceptable to use the United Nations human rights bodies to raise issues outside these bodies' jurisdiction.

We cannot agree with the approach of a number of countries linking the provision of technical assistance to States with the prevention of human rights violations. In our view, it is the practical assistance to States and helping them to build their institutional capacity-building for human rights that would be a major tool for prevention of these very violations. The initiatives of some States to attempt to give functions outside the Council to the Council to review principles and methods of work, establish new institutional formats and erode the intergovernmental nature of this body, have a destructive impact on the Council's operations. The parameters of the work of the Council are set forth in resolution 60/251, and any changes to the work of the Council should be discussed in an intergovernmental format and adopted on the basis of a broad consensus.

Dialogue in the Council will also be stunted if we impose aggressive standards characteristic of one group of countries on all others as if they represented a global standard, or if we enshrine narrow interpretations of international human rights norms as if they were universal norms. We are convinced that such gambits will only increase politicization and confrontation in the work of the Council and other United Nations human rights bodies.

Past sessions have shown that the Council continues to intrude on the jurisdiction of other United Nations bodies. We call for maintaining the division of labour of the United Nations bodies and mechanisms, as set forth by the Charter. We are of the view that the integration of human rights issues into all spheres of the work of the United Nations must have its limits and should not lead to a duplication of the work of United Nations agencies and bodies.

We are convinced that the major principle of the work of the Council and, in fact, of the entire United Nations human rights apparatus should be equal cooperation based on respect for sovereignty and the sovereign equality of States in strict compliance with procedural norms. We call on all countries to follow this principle and refrain from the use of double standards and their own narrow political concerns. Only then can we counteract further politicization and confrontation in the work of the Human Rights Council.

Mrs. Martinic (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Argentina wishes to warmly thank His Excellency Mr. Maza Martelli, President of the Human Rights Council, for being with us today in the General Assembly and welcomes his report (A/72/53) on the activities of the Council over the past year.

First of all, Argentina believes that seamless coordination between New York and Geneva is relevant for the human rights agenda, which is why we welcome the opportunity to address the recent work of the Human Rights Council in the General Assembly. Argentina has always been, and will continue to be, a strong advocate for the independence, work and achievements of the Human Rights Council in the promotion, respect and protection of human rights. We firmly believe that the Council should stand on an equal footing with the main organs of the United Nations.

Argentina wishes to take this opportunity to emphasize the role of the Human Rights Council in raising the profile of human rights throughout the world. The creation of the Council has made it possible to increase dialogue and the different channels of cooperation among States in the promotion of universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all persons, with their consequent contributions to development and international peace and security.

In addition, Argentina is pleased with the recent renewal of the mandate of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances through

Council resolution 36/6, of 28 September 2017. In this regard, Argentina calls on all States to strengthen cooperation with the special procedures and treaty bodies of the Council, answering all requests, presenting outstanding reports and ensuring that standing invitations are issued.

In that regard, in the past year Argentina hosted the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. Next year, the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food and the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment will visit Argentina.

Without respect for the existing institutions and mandates of United Nations organs, it will be extremely hard to meet the expectations of our peoples in terms of ensuring the defence and protection of human rights. Therefore, all Member States must undertake to respect the independence and integrity of the mandate of the Human Rights Council, in accordance with resolution 60/251 and other relevant resolutions.

Finally, Argentina would like to welcome the newly elected countries to the Council, and we reiterate our unwavering commitment to defending the independence and work of the Human Rights Council.

Mr. Escalante Hasbún (El Salvador) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the presence today of Ambassador Joaquín Maza Martelli, President of the Human Rights Council — a proud Salvadoran and a personal mentor of mine — and thank him for his briefing. We commend him on his hard work this year at the helm of such an important intergovernmental forum. We welcome the report (A/72/53), which we trust will be adopted in its entirety in due course by the General Assembly.

The Human Rights Council, which is a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly, is the principal intergovernmental body of the United Nations responsible for ensuring human rights, with its own jurisdiction over debates on all thematic issues related to human rights. In this regard, we wish to reiterate that in both this plenary and the Third Committee, the procedures, mechanisms, structures and competencies that form the basis of the Human Rights Council's work must be respected, given that they have all been

authorized by the General Assembly. Its primordial task is reflected not just in the diversity of the Council's agenda, but also in its resolutions, the full participation of Member States in the Universal Periodic Review and the broad participation and involvement of civil society in all discussions in Geneva.

For El Salvador, as an active member of the Human Rights Council since 2015, when we began our first term as a member of the Council, the respect and promotion of human rights is a State policy and a fundamental pillar of Salvadoran foreign policy. In recent years, we have made major progress in this field with processes that promote respect for the human person as such. Similarly, we have become engaged in international processes whereby we have become aware of the importance of organizing and promoting the full enjoyment of rights. My delegation has addressed these issues and detailed some of our experiences within each of the substantive agenda items, both in the Third Committee in New York and in Council sessions in Geneva, where we have participated in our national capacity.

We therefore wish to reaffirm that El Salvador is committed to promoting and protecting human rights for everyone without discriminating against anyone. We commend the President of the Human Rights Council for the work done by the Council this year and once again welcome him in New York on this auspicious occasion.

Mr. Mohamed (Maldives): I would like to begin by thanking His Excellency Mr. Joaquín Alexander Maza Martelli of El Salvador, President of the Human Rights Council during its eleventh cycle, for the exemplary manner in which he and his Bureau have steered the work of the Council this year. I also express my appreciation to His Excellency Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and his Office, for their continued efforts to constructively engage with all nations in the promotion and protection of human rights across the globe.

The Human Rights Council is the institutional expression of the international community's commitment to promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms for all. When establishing the Council in 2006, the General Assembly made it extremely clear, in resolution 60/251, that the Council's work should be "guided by the principles of universality, objectivity and non-selectivity". The Assembly also

mandated the Council to provide advisory services, technical assistance and capacity-building to States "in consultation with and with the consent of Member States concerned". Eleven years later, there is a profound need for the Council to return to its roots and undertake its work in an impartial, objective and non-selective manner, reflect its intergovernmental character and ensure its credibility.

It is that credibility that will enable the Council to inspire international actions in support of protecting the human rights of millions of Syrians who have been besieged, displaced and deprived of their basic right to life and liberty. My delegation condemns not only the gross human rights abuses in Syria, but the international community's acceptance of them. We seem to remain complacent when warring parties attack humanitarian targets, including hospitals, schools, utilities and aid workers; where the use of chemical weapons is now well documented; where terrorists target minorities and the most vulnerable segments of a population; and when all this happens with complete impunity.

The Human Rights Council can also inspire international actions to stop the deteriorating human rights and humanitarian crisis in the State of Palestine. That crisis emerged solely as a result of the illegal and prolonged occupation by Israel, which, as of next year, will mark its seventieth anniversary and which has denied generations of Palestinians many of their fundamental rights.

Another human rights and humanitarian crisis that has not received an adequate response from the Council is the situation facing the Rohingya community in Myanmar. The minority Muslim population is facing gross and systematic violations of its rights, in which gang rape, mass killings and the burning of homes, schools, markets, shops and mosques has become commonplace. The renewal of the fact-finding mission on Myanmar by the Council is a step in the right direction, but that is not enough. The Maldives supports the call for the urgent convening of a special session of the Human Rights Council with the aim of adopting a substantive and clear outcome resolution on ending any further atrocities.

The Human Rights Council will enjoy a greater level of support and cooperation from the broader United Nations membership when the Council is seen to be more inclusive in its working methods and when the universality principle is applied in good faith. The

working methods of the Council today are more opaque and less inclusive than those of the General Assembly. As a result, representatives who attend only a single session find themselves at a severe disadvantage, as is the case with many representatives from small island developing States. For instance, inadequate time is provided for informal consultations on most resolutions, and input by non-member States at informal negotiations is often ignored, partially owing to the disproportionate deference afforded States members of the Council.

The Maldives has called for the introduction of specific practical measures to improve the working methods of the Council, including ensuring that draft resolutions are circulated before sessions begin and that the compilation and circulation of all comments made in informal consultations is done in a timely manner, as well as ensuring that every State has the opportunity to comment on the potential effects of any draft resolution prior to its adoption.

The Maldives has had the privilege of serving on the Human Rights Council for two consecutive terms. We are proud of the contributions that we have made to the Council's work and the outcomes that we have facilitated. The Maldives introduced the idea of examining the human rights dimensions of climate change and led the Council's efforts that resulted in the establishment of a mandate on human rights and the environment. The Maldives also had the privilege to introduce, with the support of core groups, draft resolutions on parliaments as promoters of human rights, on the independence of the judiciary, on child and forced marriages, on the freedom of assembly and association, and on prevention, as well as on the establishment of and support for the Voluntary Technical Assistance Trust Fund to Support the Participation of Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States in the work of the Human Rights Council. The mandate of the Special Rapporteur on international justice is also an initiative that we supported. The Maldives is also pleased to be coordinating the work of the Asia-Pacific Group in the Council in 2017.

The Maldives remains committed to strengthening the Council, its working methods and its ability to work with the Governments of Member States in responding to and promoting human rights around the world. The Maldives will always be a committed and enthusiastic partner in efforts to craft shared solutions for our shared destiny.

Ms. Agladze (Georgia): I thank the President of the Human Rights Council for presenting his comprehensive report (A/72/53). Georgia reaffirms its full support for the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms as important instruments in efforts to promote universal respect for the protection of all human rights. During the past decade, the Human Rights Council has become the main body for mobilizing the international community to address and respond to gross human rights violations and abuses worldwide.

We also welcomed the high-level event on Human Rights Council reform, which was held at the current session of the General Assembly in September. Considering the critical humanitarian situation in many parts of the world, we deem it important to seek opportunities to reinforce the effectiveness of the Council based upon lessons learned. In our view, the effective work of the Council strongly depends on universal participation. The voice of each State Member of the United Nations, irrespective of its size, population or strength, must be heard.

With that in mind, Georgia has become the first Eastern European State to contribute to the Voluntary Technical Assistance Trust Fund to Support the Participation of Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States in the work of the Human Rights Council, which supports the participation of small-country delegations in the Council's work. Georgia would like to express its sincere gratitude to the past and current Bureaus of the Council for their efforts to improve the working methods of the Council and to manage its meetings. We believe, however, that additional measures need to be undertaken to that end, leading to further constructive engagement in that process.

Over the years, the Human Rights Council has adopted a number of important thematic and country-specific resolutions. In that regard, let me underline the resolution on cooperation with Georgia, adopted during the thirty-fourth session of the Council, which calls for immediate access to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and international and regional human rights mechanisms for the occupied regions of Georgia. Pursuant to the resolution, the Council considered the issue of Georgia at its thirty-fifth and thirty-sixth sessions. Regrettably, no access had been granted at that time to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights or to other United Nations human rights

mechanisms. However, the report presented by the High Commissioner during the thirty-sixth session of the Council reflected the serious human rights violations that have been occurring in the occupied territories.

We underline the importance of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) as a key element of the Human Rights Council's efforts to assess the human rights situation in every country. Georgia has incorporated the recommendations received during the UPR into its national action plans on human rights. It is of the utmost importance that all Member States engaged in the UPR process adhere to the accepted rules and regulations. Georgia attaches particular importance to the recommendations of the United Nations human rights system and supports steps towards enabling the mechanisms to monitor the level of the implementation of accepted UPR recommendations by Member States.

At the national level, Georgia has established an institution that is mandated to track and coordinate national follow-up and implementation of the aforementioned obligations and recommendations. It is noteworthy that this year Georgia joined the Group of Friends on national implementation, reporting and follow-up within the Human Rights Council, which seeks to take the implementation agenda forward. In our view, effective domestic implementation is the key to advancing human rights on the ground. The implementation gap remains an important issue with regard to Human Rights Council resolutions, and more attention needs to be paid to implementation aspects by Member States.

We highly value the effective participation of civil-society representatives in the work of the Human Rights Council. Further strengthening the role of non-governmental organizations is important for safeguarding the space allotted to civil society and ensuring that their voices are heard. In that context, Georgia strongly rejects any act of intimidation or reprisal directed against individuals and groups that cooperate or have cooperated with the United Nations, its representatives and mechanisms. In the area of human rights, it is our duty to prevent and ensure adequate protection against such acts.

As we discuss the importance of human rights mechanisms, I would like to underline Georgia's support for the special procedures, which represent another effective tool for addressing specific country and thematic situations. Georgia has extended a standing

invitation to all special-procedures mandate-holders and has hosted several visits by United Nations Special Rapporteurs, including the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences.

In conclusion, let me once again reiterate Georgia's strong commitment to joining the international community in strengthening and promoting human rights throughout the world.

Ms. Valiente Díaz (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Human Rights Council was established as a result of the need to address the double standards, confrontation and political manipulation that characterized the now-defunct Commission on Human Rights. Those practices, which discredited the Commission — and which we reject in the strongest terms — must be avoided. We reiterate our concern about the tendency to impose selectivity and double standards in the Council when considering human rights situations, as reflected in the report of the Human Rights Council (A/72/53). Political manipulation must cease when the Council deals with country situations. Cooperation and respectful dialogue should guide the work of the Council.

Cuba reaffirms that the Universal Periodic Review was established as the only universal mechanism for the comprehensive analysis of the human rights situations in all countries. It is the Council's main distinctive element compared to the previous Commission on Human Rights. The mechanism has proven to be a means for international cooperation in the field of human rights, based on constructive dialogue and respect for the principles of universality, objectivity, impartiality and non-selectivity. Those principles must also be respected by the special procedures of the Human Rights Council and the human rights treaty bodies. The special-procedures mandate holders must also observe the code of conduct adopted during the institution-building process of the Human Rights Council.

Cuba believes that as long as an unjust and exclusive international economic and political order persists, the Council must continue to speak out in favour of a democratic and equitable international order. For as long as unilateral coercive measures are imposed and blockades are maintained — such as the one that Cuba has suffered for more than 55 years — the Council must reject those practices and demand that they be ended.

The Council must ensure that the claim to the right to international solidarity becomes an imperative if we wish to confront the serious challenges posed by the deep economic, financial, energy, environmental and food crises that affect the whole world today.

We regret that, at the previous session of the Human Rights Council, resolutions that have enjoyed the consensus of the Member States for several years had to be adopted by vote, such as the right to food. At this session of the General Assembly, my delegation will again submit a draft resolution on that topic in the hope that such an important initiative will enjoy the constructive support of all delegations so that we can send a clear message of consensus on such a crucial issue.

Cuba will continue to work on promoting the rights of peoples to self-determination, peace and development and the right to food, the establishment of a democratic and equitable international order, the fight against racism, xenophobia and all forms of discrimination, the realization of cultural rights and respect for diversity. Cuba affirms its firm commitment to promoting and respecting all human rights for everyone.

Ms. Wagner (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Switzerland would like to thank the President of the Human Rights Council for his report (A/72/53). Switzerland is pleased that the opportunity was taken this year to formulate specific proposals for strengthening the impact and contribution of the Human Rights Council to the protection and promotion of the respect for human rights around the world. Those proposals have served as a basis for identifying priority courses of action that now need to be implemented so as to strengthen the human rights pillar at the United Nations as a whole. Switzerland will continue its engagement in that respect.

First, Switzerland firmly believes that the international community's success in protecting and promoting respect for human rights depends on the better integration of human rights into the United Nations global agenda. The relationship between human rights and peace and security is worthy of special attention, particularly in view of its potential for conflict prevention. It was with that in mind that Switzerland and other Member States launched an appeal on 13 June to put human rights at the heart of Member States' efforts in conflict prevention and, in particular, to enhance the exchange of useful

information between the Human Rights Council and the Security Council. Switzerland invites all Member States to join the 71 countries that have already offered their support to that appeal and to commit to putting it into action.

Secondly, I wish to comment on the space granted to civil society, where we are seeing increasingly serious violations and abuses of the rights to the freedom of expression and the freedom of peaceful assembly and association. Civil society plays a fundamental role in United Nations mechanisms. The greater inclusion and protection of civil society therefore represents an investment in strengthening the impact, efficiency and credibility of the Human Rights Council.

In that regard, Switzerland is concerned about numerous cases of intimidation and reprisals against human rights defenders and other members of civil society while they exercise their fundamental rights by providing first-hand information to representatives of United Nations mechanisms. Switzerland wishes to thank the President of the Human Rights Council for his commitment to follow up on such cases and urges

the international community to reverse that negative trend and take further action to protect those defending human rights — especially those who cooperate with the Council and its mechanisms.

Switzerland feels that the increase in the Council's workload confirms the relevance of its mandate, but does not believe that that workload is sustainable in the medium term. Further reflection is needed on optimizing working methods and implementing the relevant proposals already on the table. At the same time, we believe that it is essential to work on improving the atmosphere at the Human Rights Council and avoid a climate of confrontation. Switzerland calls on all Member States to work constructively on Council matters so as to enhance its credibility and efficiency.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 67?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 12.15 p.m.